

Delaware's Foster Grandparent Program Celebrates 50 Years of Service with May 19 Event in Dover; Since 1967, Seniors Have Shared Love, Support and Knowledge with a Total of 70,000 At-Risk Children

NEW CASTLE (May 16, 2017) – Hundreds of volunteers, family members, and others involved in Delaware's Foster Grandparent Program will gather Friday, May 19, at Dover Downs Hotel & Conference Center to celebrate the 50 anniversary of the program in the state.

Since 1967, hundreds of Delawareans 55 and older have been meeting one-on-one and with groups of children in day care centers, Head Starts, schools, early learning centers, and via programs at specialized facilities. These seniors have mentored and tutored an estimated 70,000 children with special or exceptional needs in Delaware during that time through the nationally recognized Foster Grandparent Program.

The program, funded by the Corporation for Community and National Service (CNCS), is administered by the State Office of Volunteerism (SOV), part of the Department of Health and Social Services' Division of State Service Centers (DSSC).

Friday's event in Dover is designed to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Foster Grandparent Program and to recognize the volunteers and various public, private and nonprofit agencies that serve as volunteer stations for the Foster Grandparents to engage and develop appropriate relationships

with the children being served.

"The personal commitment made by these senior volunteers as part of the Foster Grandparent Program is making a difference in the lives of some of Delaware's most at-risk children," said Governor John Carney. "Foster Grandparents share their love, time and experience with children who are vulnerable and in need of compassion, role models and friendship. I am proud of the success this program has achieved over the past 50 years in Delaware."

Lottie Banks has mentored scores of children over her 35 years with the Foster Grandparent Program. Grandma Lottie, as she is known to the children she works with, celebrated her 100th birthday Dec. 10, 2016. She has been serving at NCC Head Start Lambson Center for the past three years and previously served at the LaFiesta Day Care in Wilmington and Community Day Nursery in New Castle.

"Having been Grandma Lottie's FGP Supervisor for the past 12 years has been a joy, to say the least," said Jane Williams, supervisor of the Foster Grandparent Program in New Castle County. "I am still amazed by this gracious lady every day. ... I've heard many, including myself say, "When I grow up I want to be just like Grandma Lottie."

Williams said the teacher in the classroom where Grandma Lottie currently serves says the children all flock to her when she comes in.

"Making a difference early in a child's life can mean the difference between a child who will see the possibility of success in life and one unable to see many positive outcomes," said Dr. Kara Walker, Secretary of the Department of Health and Social Services. "The influence these seniors are having by spending time with and mentoring these children is priceless."

Jane Smack has volunteered with the Seaford School District

for 15 years through the Foster Grandparent Program. She works one-on-one and with a small group helping students learn to spell, improve reading skills and complete math work.

“It has been an honor to work for the past three years with Mrs. Jane Smack or ‘Mom-Mom Jane’ as she is known by the students in our first grade classroom at West Seaford Elementary School,” said Diana Zlock, a teacher at West Seaford.

“She encourages the students to try their best with their work and be kind to each other. Jane always seems to know the academic needs of the students before I even tell her what I need her to work on with a child, “ Zlock added. “The students in our school district who have had the privilege of learning from Mom-Mom Jane over the past 15 years will always remember her for believing in them.”

The Foster Grandparent Program is coordinated by the Delaware Department of Health and Social Services, through the Division of State Service Center’s State Office of Volunteerism in conjunction with the Foster Grandparent Program Advisory Council. In 2016, the statewide program coordinated the activities of 205 Foster Grandparents at more than 115 volunteer stations, reaching more than 1,226 children. Through sharing their love, time, experience and talent, the volunteers in the Foster Grandparent Program spent more than 198,557 hours last year tutoring and mentoring at-risk children.

Delaware’s Foster Grandparents 50th celebration falls during Senior Corps Week (May 15-19), which highlights the nationwide impact of the Foster Grandparent Program, RSVP, and Senior Companion Program, and recognizes volunteers, community sponsors and partners. Across the country, Foster Grandparents are mentoring and tutoring students, Senior Companions are helping vulnerable seniors to remain in their own homes, and RSVP programs are providing such services as disaster relief,

caring for the environment, supporting veterans and military families, and providing tax preparation services to low-income and elderly individuals.

Read about and or highlight the work of Delaware's Senior Volunteers this week using the hashtag #SeniorCorpsWorks. Follow Volunteer Delaware on Facebook to see how Senior Corps is working in countless ways to make Delaware's communities stronger.

For more information about Delaware's Foster Grandparents Program:

<http://dhss.delaware.gov/dhss/dssc/servede/foster-grandparents.html>.

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